

# RAILROADING in New Jersey

(New Jersey probably had a more important role in the establishment and development of railroads than any other state in the country. This article, the fourth of a series, deals with the development of the Elizabethtown & Somerville and the Morris & Essex which eventually became two of the state's great commuting railroads.)



Lithograph of 1844 from the Thomas T. Taber collection shows horse-drawn Morris & Essex train on Broad

street, passing Upper Common (now Washington Park). Destination is Center street depot of N. J. R. R.

## Carriers for Garden State Products

SOME still refused to give up the notion that the railroad was a snorting demon hatched by Satan, but by 1835 that was already an old-fashioned idea. It wasn't too hard to admit that railroads which connected great industrial centers with shipping points had chances of brilliant financial success.

Camden and Amboy, Paterson and Jersey City, Newark and Jersey City—no question of the need for such connecting rail arteries. But what were those fanatic farmers out in Somerville and Morristown thinking about with their insistent pushing for railroads?

Consider the plain south of the Watchung Mountains, for example, where a company had been chartered as early as February 9, 1831, to build

surrounding rich farmlands would support a railroad?

Worse, as far as Newark to Morristown railroad was concerned, no sooner did a body leave Newark than the First and Second Mountains got in the way. At a time when men weren't even sure a railroad would work on level ground those Morris County promoters were talking about running tracks over The Short Hills!

Yet in the mountains of Essex and Morris and on the Plains of Union and Somerset the visionaries persevered. They won their rights to build from the state—the Elizabethtown and Somerville Rail Road being chartered in 1831; the Morris and Essex four years later.

The two lines were to have remarkably parallel careers. First, they were built only after severe financial strain for their founding fathers. They collapsed financially, only to pick themselves up and build on to Phillipsburg. Later they fought for anthracite traffic, with victory of varying sorts for both. Finally, and perhaps above all, they were destined to become two of New Jersey's great

what is now Irvington. You make up our minds, the M. & E. builders said to the people along the way.

A polite query went out to leaders along the alternate routes. It said in effect: "Do you really want a railroad? If so, how much stock will you buy?" A resounding "yea" came back to the first question; less ready were the answers to query number two.

ORANGE wanted the railroad badly enough to get up money for some stock. Newarkers had a battle between the North End and the South Side for Morris & Essex entry into the city. It wasn't too difficult for the railroad builders to make a choice:

The North Enders subscribed to \$100,000 in stock and offered a free right-of-way. The South Siders offered nothing—and got nothing.

Westward the course of the M. & E. spread, taking full advantage of donations.

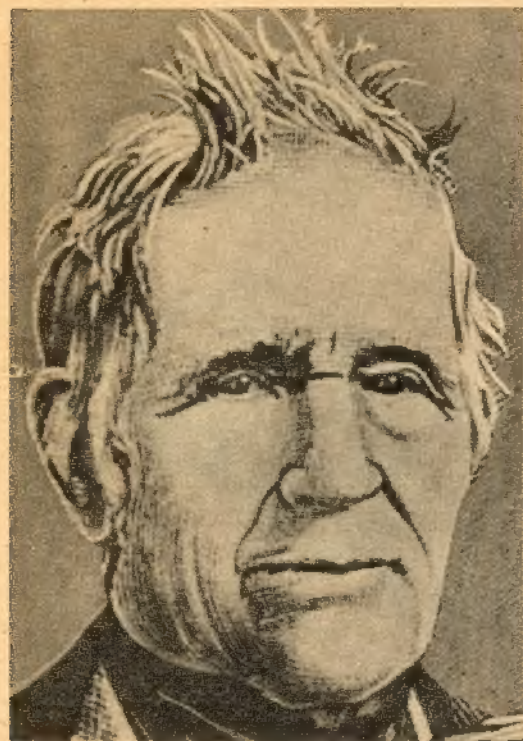
The grade of 140 feet to the mile up to what is now Roseville was steep, but the right-of-way was free. It didn't make much sense to climb 80

They called on modest Seth Boyden, Newark's "uncommercial inventor."

Boyden had never even seen a steam locomotive, but when the railroad men left his machine shop they had a promise: "I'll build you a locomotive powerful enough to overcome the grades."

WHAT Boyden promised Boyden accomplished. By July, 1837, his little six-ton "Orange" locomotive was successfully tried with Boyden himself at the throttle. A month later two cars loaded with 200 passengers were pulled up the hills to Orange and back, to the unbounded praise of newspaper editors of the day.

The triumphant trial was marred just before its close, however, by the M. & E.'s first fatal accident. As the



Newark's Seth Boyden built first M. & E. locomotive.

a railroad from Elizabethtown to Somerville. Verily an "abundant and delightful country" where fertile farms prospered, but what about industry—on which railroads grew fat? A few master hatters and five tailoring establishments in Plainfield and two copper mines near Somerville? Not enough, friend, to make a railroad pay.

MORRISTOWN businessmen were optimistic, but that could be chalked up to the pride they held in their splendid old square and their beautiful new courthouse. True enough the Morris County mountains were full of iron, but wouldn't the Morris Canal take care of the iron masters? Did the Morristown men think that the struggling village of Orange or the

### Making Railroads Pay Was Problem of Pioneer Builders Who Sought Answer in Freight Routes BY JOHN T. CUNNINGHAM

commuting railroads—the Jersey Central and the Lackawanna.

THE Elizabethtown & Somerville was founded early, but five and a half years elapsed before four horses pulled the first "Town Car" along rails from the Elizabethport ferry docks to Broad street, Elizabeth, on August 13, 1836.

Meanwhile Morris and Essex backers had caught up, then gone rapidly ahead of the valley company, partially because several Newark businessmen caught the enthusiasm of the Morris men and agreed to help. The charter of January 29, 1835, provided for \$300,000 in capital stock.

Choosing the Morris & Essex right-of-way was a venture beyond mere engineering surveys. M. & E. founders were willing to comply in any way with provisions of their charter, which said they were to connect with the New Jersey Rail Road "at or between Newark and Elizabethtown."

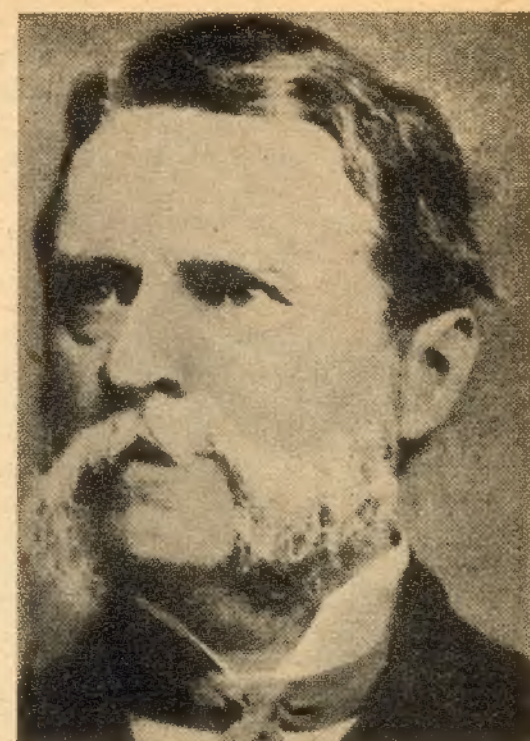
From Millville (now Millburn) to Morristown the way was fairly certain. Eastward there were two possibilities—by way of Orange or via

feet to the mile from Millville up to The Summit of The Short Hills. Nothing up there but woods, but since Mr. Bonnell had been good enough to give it away if the railroad came by . . .

Up to The Summit went the Morris & Essex.

SOME Madison and Morristown folk were a bit recalcitrant in the matter of both stock purchases and land donations. Some even raised their asking prices for land! A Morristown paper warned against "trying to keep what you have got and get all you can." Nevertheless an all-rail route finally twisted and climbed its way from stockholder to stockholder and land donor to land donor, all the way to Morristown by January 1, 1838.

Even before the first horse-drawn cars reached Orange on November 19, 1836, it was obvious that the mountains were going to make steam locomotion difficult—perhaps impossible. Morris & Essex men knew there was one man who could overcome the excesses of right-of-way if any one could.



John Taylor Johnston was S. & E. president in 1848.

"Orange" pushed the two cars down Broad street they became derailed and two men trying to jump were killed.

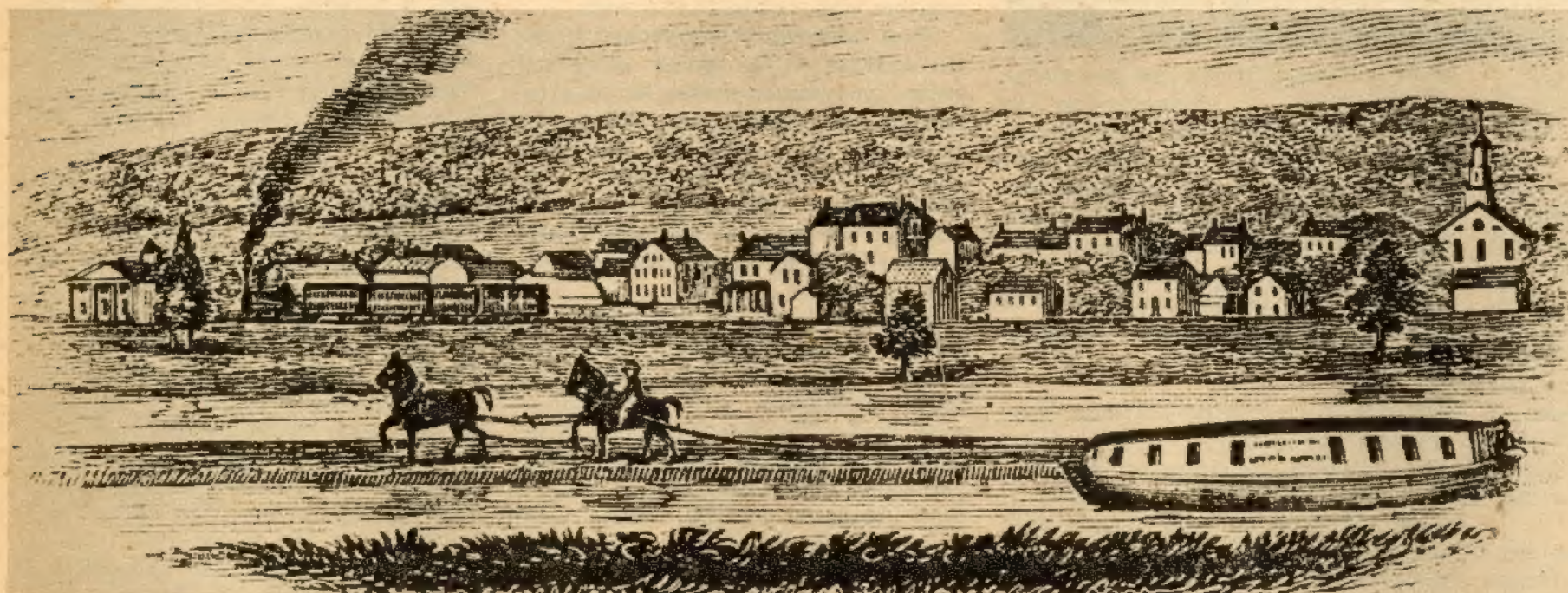
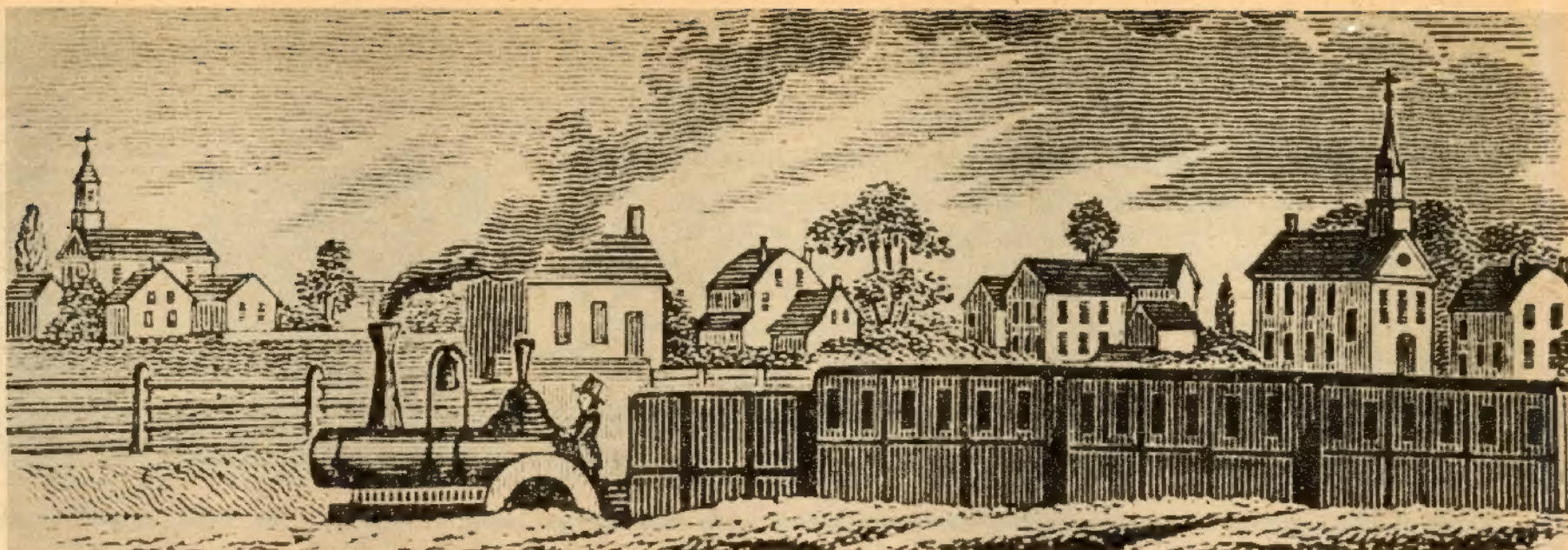
The accident, a Newark paper commented, "caused much unfavorable comment."

Seth Boyden did much of the M. & E. repair work for years. He was patently not out to get rich from the railroad. His bills show such items as "work on an engine after running over a horse, \$2.50" (a later bill charged \$3 for repairs after a cow was struck). One of his bills was apologetic, carried suggestions for improving the roadbed and cutting down the cost of engine repairs!

Starting in January, 1838, the Morris & Essex could offer three-hour service between Morristown and New



Madison as a village from 1845 woodcut. The locomotive was imaginative interpretation of Seth Boyden's original "Orange" on part of artist who also put top-hat on engineer.



Early view of Bound Brook showing Delaware & Raritan Canal, linking New Brunswick and Trenton, with an Elizabethtown & Somerville train on far bank. In background are Watchung Mountains.

York, with an early morning and an early evening train for any businessman hardly enough to work in New York, live in Morristown and spend 1,800 hours annually on trains.

**T**HIS is what the patient passenger of 1840 faced on an M. & E. ride (and, allowing for differences in terrain, what all railroad riders of the day endured):

A bell rang in the Morristown station for a full hour before a train left (an improvement added after some Newarkers missed the 3 1/4 o'clock train one day when they put faith in the town clock, which had been stopped for three months at 3 o'clock). The "traveling agent" took up the fare, the "hand to attend the brakes" released the stops, the "woodpasser" tossed wood into the engine and the "driver" pulled the throttle.

Eastward down the crude roadbed the "Orange" sped. The "roadbed" in many places was merely two long logs laid lengthwise with timbers fastened crosswise. Atop these strips of bar iron served as tracks. Standard equipment on the tender were spikes and a sledge hammer to fasten down lengths of rail which had

worked loose, but sometimes a loose rail snaked up through the floor to endanger the lives of passengers.

An early Morristown commuter, one Vincent B. King, was said to be so afraid of these "snake heads" that he rode back and forth to New York every day without sitting down! His stand, while firm, was not interminable—the strap iron rail was all replaced with good heavy rail by 1884.

**S**TOPS had to be made to take on wood; often rail fences succumbed to the insatiable appetite of the wood-burning "Orange." Sometimes pauses were made to put out roadside fires caused by sparks spraying from the locomotive, and always there were stops at Millville pond and Summit to take on water. At Summit the engine used its own drivewheels to pump water, through an ingenious arrangement devised by Stephen Vail.

How patient was the passenger! In Newark his cars were taken off the M. & E. tracks, hauled downtown to Center street behind a horse and then hooked to a New Jersey Rail Road engine for the rest of the trip to Jersey City. That persisted until 1854, when the New Jersey Rail Road built a

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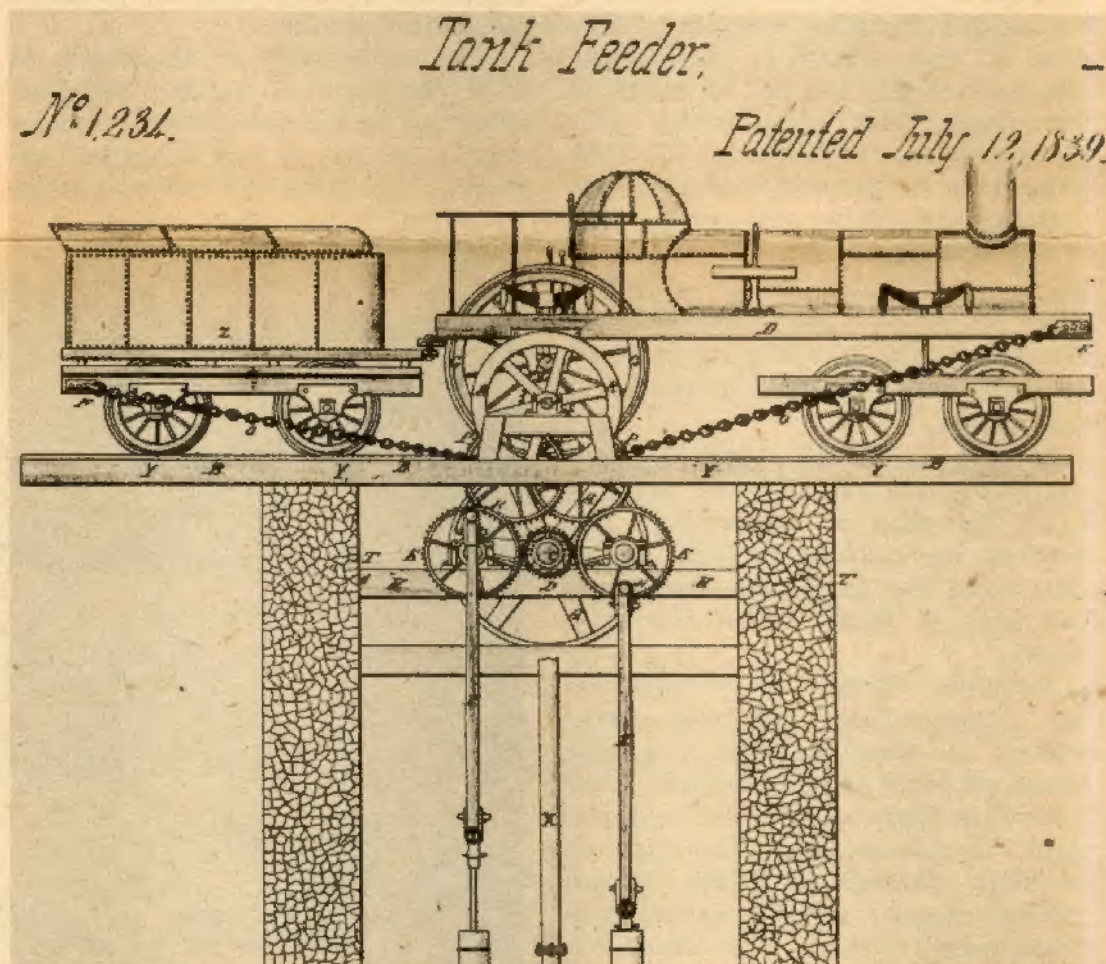
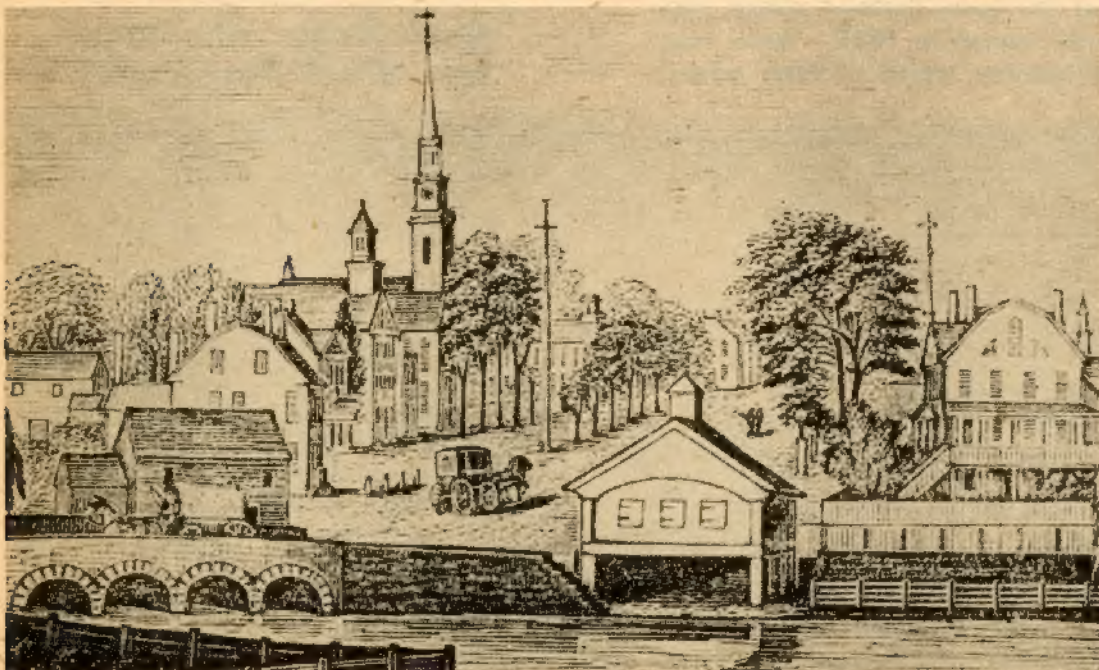


Diagram of Stephen Vail's ingenious arrangement at Summit by which the engine used own drivewheels to pump water into tank.

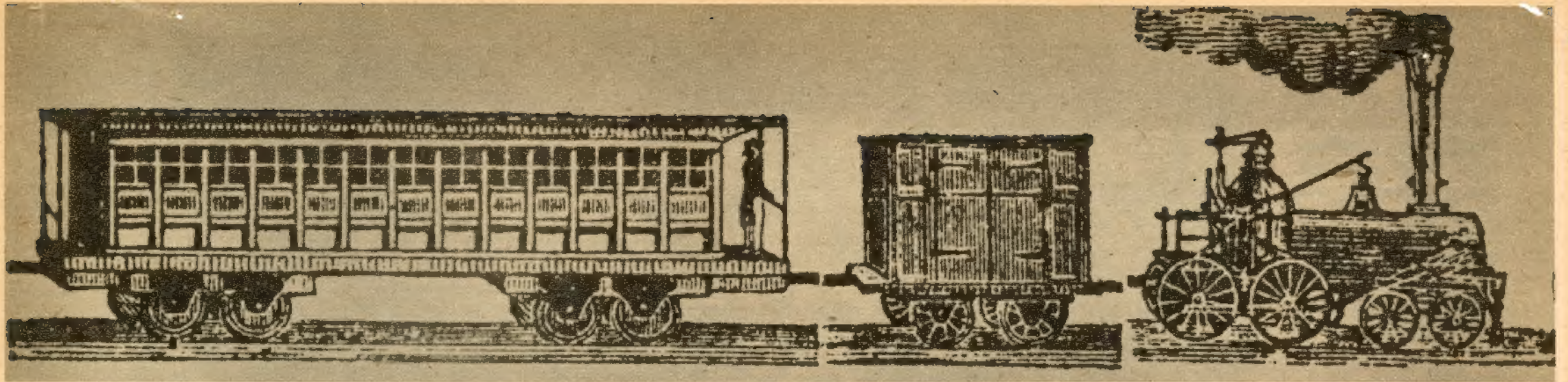


Elizabethtown around 1840 before railroads made it thriving city.



Dover viewed around 1848 when M. & E. arrived to tap iron output.





Sketch of Elizabethtown and Somerville's first train which went into service January 1, 1839. The 9-ton "Eagle" engine was made by Baldwin.

## JERSEY RAILROADS--Garden State Carriers

(Continued from Preceding Page)

bridge across the Passaic River to connect the railroads in North Newark.

Morris & Essex freight service started in 1838, with the railroad agreeing to haul everything but "powder, vitriol and aqua fortis."

It was casual railroading, at best. The conductor stuck the waybill for freight in his cap and then trusted to his memory to drop the freight at the right places. He didn't need much of a memory at that; a good day's haul was a couple of boxes of small goods, a few barrels of flour and assorted little packages.

The struggle to build and operate the pioneer route through the Jersey mountains had put the Morris & Essex in sad financial straits. One year it even voted to discontinue salaries and pay its men on a day to day basis. But economically poor though it was, at least the M. & E. was giving service and thinking about building on to Dover and maybe even to the Delaware.

**D**OWN on the plain beneath the Watchungs things weren't going half as well with the Elizabethtown & Somerville.

It was to be 11 years between chartering the railroad and building it all the way to Somerville. The roadbed was nothing to excite envy; rails were the same thin, dangerous bar iron as that on the Morris & Essex.

Somehow, though, the interest of the citizens along the way never waned. On March 21, 1838, a sizeable group gathered at Jack Thorn's "Long Room" in Plainfield at "early candle light" to discuss what they could do to help. Westfield, Yellow Tavern (Bound Brook) and Somerville residents rallied around. On January 1, 1839 the word came:

"The locomotive 'Eagle' will haul its first train up the valley from Elizabethtown to Plainfield today." It was a slow trip.

On one of its first runs the "Eagle" engineer was challenged by a horse

lover in Elizabethtown to a race as far as Westfield. A passenger on the train wagered \$5 and the race was on. As the "Eagle" gave a sudden jerk and the wheels of the passenger car started to creak and groan behind the laboring engine the horseman cracked his whip over the trotting team.

He collected the \$5—had to wait 10 minutes for the "Eagle" to come lurching into town.

**S**ERVICE stretched to Yellow Tavern in 1840 and then, with a dying gasp, the Elizabethtown & Somerville rolled into Somerville on January 1, 1842. Lemonade and cake were served at the village inn to celebrate (admittedly a moderate fete, but strictly in keeping with the wretched company finances).

The combination of the Panic of 1837 and costs of building had flattened the E. & S. completely. Income wasn't enough to pay operating expenses. In 1846 the railroad prop-

erties were sold at auction to the contractors who had built the road.

Soon, however, things looked up for the railroad on the plains; quickly it gained pre-eminence over its counterpart in the mountains. First, the Somerville & Eastern Rail Road was chartered in 1847 to build on to Phillipsburg. Then, and most important, the dynamic and resourceful 28-year-old John Taylor Johnston became president in 1848.

Johnston (who said he hated "dishonesty in any form" and didn't care for any Johnston "who spelled his name without a 't'") immediately took hold. The line from Elizabethtown to Somerville was merged with the Somerville to Easton road and the name changed to The Central Rail Road Company of New Jersey in 1849.

**T**HE new president carried out two main objectives: To move quickly to the Delaware to pick up coal and other raw materials, and to develop the land along the railroad. In addition, he strove for operating efficiency. He was the first railroad

president in America to put his trainmen in uniform. He set up prizes for men who maintained their grounds well. He put a car on all trains for "unescorted women." Johnston was a promoter in every sense of the word.

Jersey Central's biggest early celebration was July 2, 1852, when Phillipsburg finally was reached. A writer of the day captured the mood:

"Eight splendid cars, drawn by the gigantic 'Pennsylvania' and accompanied by Dodsworth's Band, sped through the glorious landscapes of Hunterdon and Warren to the wonder of thousands of delighted inhabitants who thronged to stations and greeted the party with the firing of guns and the waving of handkerchiefs and banners."

"From this day that undeveloped iron country began to yield up its wealth . . . the country sang with the ring of the tilt hammer, and log cabins were exchanged for beautiful dwellings."

**M**EANWHILE, up in the mountains, the Morris & Essex was stirring again. It rallied from its financial troubles and in 1848 pulled into Dover to tap the rich iron regions and to connect with the Morris Canal. At a tumultuous reception speakers lauded the "ponderous rails set upon a foundation as substantial as the iron mountains amongst which they are laid."

Legislative approval was granted to the Morris & Essex in 1851 to extend to the Delaware. Hackettstown was reached in 1854 but lack of funds and the Civil War slowed construction down the valley to Phillipsburg.

Phillipsburg saw the M. & E. completion spike driven in 1865, ending a 30-year struggle across North Jersey's rugged terrain. The Morris & Essex builders drew a breath and took a closer look at the little Jersey Central which had fought to the Delaware 13 years before and already was growing sleek on a diet of hard coal. Now both were at the very edge of the coal fields; the battle for anthracite was fully joined.

**Next Week: The Race for "Black Diamonds."**



Tunnels through embankment of the Jersey Central's right of way at High Bridge is all that remains of the span (below) which was erected over the Raritan River's South Branch in 1852. Area was filled in to accommodate weight of heavier trains of later years.

